



Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony Regarding HAVEN

Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron, Members of the Appropriations Committee,

The Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) is the largest veterinary professional society in Connecticut and it represents the majority of Connecticut's practicing veterinarians. We are among the many health care professions, and citizens, concerned about addiction and impairment, topics both current and highly visible in our society today.

Healthcare professionals suffer from impairment at the same rate as the general population. Professional expertise is no immunity from these disorders however, in many cases their risk of impairment is higher and the potential consequences of that impairment on others is greater.

In the past, only discipline, shame, permanent career damage, financial ruin and negative family repercussions were to be expected once impairment was revealed, even when done so voluntarily.

As a humane alternative, with the paired goals of protecting the public from impaired professionals while also supporting peer mental health, several CT health professional organizations collaborated to help pass a law that enabled HAVEN, a voluntary and confidential program that encourages health professionals to choose to access care, before patients are harmed and before they destroy their careers and their lives.

In 2007 these efforts culminated with the passage of CGS Sec. 19a-12a, and the creation of HAVEN. Since then, HAVEN has assisted over 1,000 varied health professionals.

HAVEN has met the demand for its services, but from the beginning has struggled with limited resources due to budgetary constraints. In response, the professional societies collaborated again in 2015 to meet this challenge by voluntarily agreeing to fund HAVEN with a nominal (\$5.00) increase in state professional licensing fees, despite the fact that Connecticut already had the highest professional licensing fees in the country.

Public Acts 15-244 (Sections 137, 137) and 15-5 (Sec. 479) make clear that these new funds are to be directed by the Department of Public Health specifically to support HAVEN's mission, as set forth in the enabling statute, CGS 19a-12a. Since its effective date, October 1, 2015, the Department has failed to transfer the legally required funds to HAVEN, an amount now exceeding \$800,000.00.

To add insult to injury, the Department's newly proposed budget eliminates the dedicated HAVEN account entirely, yet maintains the \$ 5.00 licensing fee surcharge intended to fund HAVEN. As members of the collective health professional societies of Connecticut, we are deeply disappointed by this development, and we ask that the legislature direct the Department to fulfill its legal obligation, and restore the HAVEN-directed account as previously enacted, and without conditions.

The Department has also attempted to mandate that HAVEN sign a contract allowing the Department to rescind funding at its discretion in contravention of the law. The Attorney General's office has been asked to intervene to assure that the Department complies; yet the Department is instead asking that the law be changed. We ask that the legislature reject the Department's request, and direct it to release the funding as the law requires. The health of all Connecticut citizens and its health professionals must be assured. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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